

2003 Aquatic Reserve Technical Advisory Committee Recommendation

Cypress Island

The Technical Advisory Committee (Committee) unanimously recommended managing this site as an Environmental Aquatic Reserve. The Committee felt that the existing boundaries – surrounding Cypress Island and including Towhead, Strawberry and Cone Islands- are appropriate.

The committee noted that this site represents what environmental reserves should be, with evidence of valued environmental resources, excellent upland conditions and opportunities for coordinating upland, intertidal and subtidal management. Environmental attributes noted by the Committee during their recommendation are:

- The connectivity of the reserve area to upland Natural Areas Program (NAP) and Natural Resource Conservation Area (NRCA) management units;
- The size of the reserve;
- The position between the San Juan Islands and the Strait of Georgia oceanographic regions; and
- The excellent condition of local resources.

Boundaries

The Committee determined that the existing boundaries surrounding Cypress Island, including Towhead, Strawberry, and Cone Islands are appropriate.

The Committee was prompted to evaluate whether offshore islands, including Cone, Strawberry and Towhead Islands should continue to be included in the reserve. It was decided that the smaller offshore islands comprised an important component of the reserve and that these islands should be encompassed with a similar buffer to Cypress Island. Many of the offshore islands are surrounded by shallow rocky reef habitat.

The Committee was also asked to review the shallow offshore areas to the north of Towhead Island and the south of Cypress Island. The inclusion of shallow areas to the north and south of the reserve were considered appropriate because these areas cover valued and declining bottomfish resources. Fish species commonly found in rocky reef areas include rockfish, and lingcod.

Some Technical Advisory Committee members noted that the irregular boundary of the site might create challenges for educating the public and visitors of the location of the offshore boundary. There may be benefits to designing a boundary that will be more easily interpreted and understood by occasional visitors. This issue is particularly important if management efforts are coordinated with Tribal governments, other state agencies, or non-government organizations.